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**The “Camp David Consensus”:  
Ideas, Intellectuals and the Division of Labor in Egypt’s Foreign Policy toward Israel<sup>1</sup>**

This paper explores the nature, background and evolution of the “Camp David consensus.” Under this consensus Egyptian intellectuals and political movements broadly accept that the Egyptian regime must deal constructively and “correctly” with Israel as a state, but insist that society has the right and responsibility to resist Zionism. The consensus rests on particular ways of understanding Israel, and the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, that can be traced back to the formative years of the Egyptian republic under Nasser. The has served the interests of both regimes and opposition movements and in this sense represents a “double instrumentalization” of foreign policy. The paper, which examines a range of regime and intellectual pronouncements during the Nasser and Sadat periods, as well as more recently, challenges the growing use within International Relations, particularly in the Middle East context, of the concept of “identity” to explain state behavior.

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Ever since Malcolm Kerr’s (1965) *The Arab Cold War*, it has become almost reflexive for scholars of Middle East international relations to consider Arab behavior and rhetoric toward Israel as really about inter-Arab rivalries. The independent variable of “Arabism”, according to this reading, has been the main constitutive factor in regional foreign policies (Barnett 1998; Telhami and Barnett 2002). Arab views on Israel, when thought significant, are often only scrutinized in narrowly polemical terms as evidence of anti-Semitism (Litvak and Webman 2009; Sagiv and Svirsky 1995; Holtzman and Schlossberg 2006; Nettler 1998). The current paper argues that Israel has been far less peripheral to Egyptian concerns, and to the formation of foreign policy—broadly defined—than the now classic “Arabist” readings suggest. Conceptions of Israel have related closely, even dialectically, to Egyptian conceptions of self and have important social significance. In particular, shifting interpretations and images of Israel have informed the elaboration of pervasive “societal paradigms,” through which intellectuals associated with social movements have understood their political role. The role of intellectuals has been central to the so-called “cold peace” of the Mubarak era and as such forms an integral part of Egyptian foreign policy toward Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s note: A version of this paper was presented at ISA annual convention, 17-20 February, 2010 in New Orleans. I thank the panel participants and discussant as well as the ISQ anonymous reviewers. I would like to dedicate this article to Professor Fred Halliday (1946-2010).

This paper has two broad aims. The first is to historicise ideas on Israel and, in particular, to show that they constituted more than the unifying “other” for Arab identity: for Egyptian regimes they often reflected a rational desire not to go to war. The second is to show that by popularising certain images of Israel, intellectuals and political movements have collectively sought out a degree of agency for themselves that is independent of the Egyptian state. It is this division of labor that may be termed the “Camp David consensus.” Societal hostility toward Israel suits, to some degree, the regime’s purposes; and intellectuals largely accept the need for Egypt to deal “correctly” and diplomatically with Israel as a state. The idea of foreign policy “instrumentalization” is useful in this regard. To assert, in this case, that foreign policy is instrumentalized implies that Egypt’s relationship with Israel is *about* more than itself for foreign policy actors. This is not to suggest, *a la* Chomsky’s “internalist” interpretation of the Cold War (Halliday 1994: 173), that the Arab-Israeli conflict has no substance, but is rather to foreground some of the internal dimensions of that conflict, which are generally lost in “Arabist” accounts of Middle Eastern international relations. The Egyptian regime is not alone among those of the Middle East in having instrumentalized its relations with Israel to justify internal repression, military build-up, and so on *without* having to actually engage in military action. But in the Egyptian case societal actors have also instrumentalized the conflict to serve broader or ancillary domestic political aims, particularly in staking out spheres of political agency or waging domestic political struggles. The Camp David consensus thus functions as a kind of “double-instrumentalization” of foreign policy, with the latter viewed as a composite of state and societal positions.

After situating the argument empirically and theoretically, the paper looks at conceptions of Israel as developed during the Nasser period, and how they contributed to the evolution of societal paradigms. It then traces the divergence between regime and intellectual approaches to Israel following the Six Day War and during the presidency of Anwar Sadat. The paper examines a range of intellectual interventions from the 1970s—a period when many current assumptions and frameworks were elaborated and synthesized. The final section discusses some more recent views on Israel to demonstrate the continued resonance of societal approaches to Egyptian foreign policy and the perseverance of the Camp David consensus.

### *Empirical and Theoretical Context*

Particularly as Egypt’s post-Mubarak future remains uncertain, an examination of the broader intellectual context of its relationship with Israel is timely and instructive. The analysis that follows suggests that a change in leadership—even if Egypt were to move in an Islamist direction—would be unlikely to substantially alter the relationship. Egyptian images of Israel represent a fascinating case for examining a societal role in foreign policy since the official policy of peace with Israel diverges so sharply from a prevailing “culture of war” (Haggi 2003). This disconnect, which became obvious in the 1970s, can in fact be traced back to the political and ideological strategies employed by the Nasser regime in the 1950s and 1960s and to a large extent reflects the more basic structural imbalances in the Egyptian state.

The Camp David consensus, or the coexistence of a policy of peace and culture of war, is often referred to (though not, generally, in Egypt) as the “cold peace.” It is perhaps the outside perception, particularly from Israel, of a cold peace that most strongly binds the societal and intellectual developments discussed in this paper to foreign policy as a whole, and in particular to foreign policy outcomes. As has been observed, Egypt-Israel relations have been “correct” but not warm (Cantori and Baynard 2002: 367). Mubarak’s priorities have generally been to keep the teetering Egyptian economy afloat, maintain Egyptian status as lynchpin of stability in the region and, most crucially, ensure continued US support for his regime (Dessouki 1991). These priorities

have all encouraged the regime to maintain peace with Israel and expand relations in the areas of trade, agriculture, tourism and oil. The “coldness” of the peace is generally seen to relate to the lukewarm or hostile inter-cultural relations between the two countries. While we should not minimize the extent of Egypt-Israel cooperation on the state level, the coldness certainly affects the extent to which Egypt could freely, or openly, align itself with Israeli policies or interests, regardless of whether they correspond with Egyptian ones. It also influences the ways in which Israeli, and US, elites view the Egypt-Israel relationship and hence becomes an at least latent or potential factor in Israeli decision-making (Pipes 2006; Eldar 2003).

The emergent Camp David consensus, and the role of the intellectual in Egypt therein, was recognized soon after the signing of the peace treaty in 1979:

In Egypt there is acceptance of the peace process at the governmental and mass levels, but not as much acceptance at the elite [i.e. intellectual] level. In other words, those Egyptians who can best carry through on their own decisions support normalization only marginally. Egyptian elites see themselves as relatively free to move within their intellectual world. They hold opinions based on factors which include, but go beyond, the positions of government. (Cohen and Azar 1981: 98)

What acceptance there was of the peace process at the mass level—in particular normalization—would also evaporate following Sadat’s death as intellectuals and activists were allowed to mobilise on the Palestine issue. Particularly at critical junctures like the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the two *intifadas* and, most recently, the Gaza War and blockade demonstrations in support of Palestine, and by extension against normalization, intensified. In this way the role of society, in particular intellectuals, is of direct relevance to Egyptian foreign policy as a whole.

The analysis in this paper has important implications for studying the role of ideas in foreign policy. One of the main problems with idealist approaches to international relations in general, and particularly Middle Eastern foreign policies, is that they tend to focus on “identity”, which is treated as, if not static, then unitary and “momentarily fixed” at the point that policy is made. Other, less “successful”, versions of identity then cease to have an impact on foreign policy. This necessarily results in a somewhat one-dimensional view of foreign policy. Although Barnett in particular is careful to avoid attributing to identity direct causal power, instead suggesting that identity renders certain foreign policy choices possible, the one-dimensional view leads to conclusions such as that the identity shift from Arabism to statism in Egypt facilitated the peace agreement with Israel (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 18). The somewhat teleological view of national identity as shifting from Arabism to statism, however, misreads the significance of ideas. Following Barnett’s logic, for example, the apparent rise in Islamic identity in Egypt from the 1970s—including at the state level—would open up the greater possibility of Egypt cancelling the Camp David treaty and reverting to a more warlike posture. This, as we know, has not occurred despite broad societal hostility toward Israeli actions. Egyptian policy toward Israel has not substantially changed since 1979, but nor has society developed a “warmer” attitude toward Israel. The identity shift approach does not, in other words, help us understand the cold peace.

The current paper avoids using the category of “identity” and instead views the formation of ideas on foreign policy in terms of “paradigms.” Rather than being momentarily fixed, foreign policy paradigms evolve and interact with other, often seemingly contradictory, paradigms in civil and political society. Ideas generated by intellectuals associated with sociopolitical movements in opposition are not marginal to those employed by a government or regime, but are part of the overall interpretive framework in which foreign policy is made. The significance of ideas can then be viewed in two ways. First, they impact on the broader foreign policy orientation of the state toward

others (Egypt's relations with Israel being "correct," but not warm). Second, even though ideas may be at odds with official state policy, they are nonetheless important in defining the ways in which societal movements conceive of their own roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis external actors. The analysis of this paper, which identifies a long-standing consensus on a "division of labor" in foreign policy reveals that the landscape of ideas, and the ways in which they condition foreign policy, in Egypt have been more complex and rooted than identity approaches suggest.

## I. 1952-1973

### *Israel as Imperialism*

The conception of Israel as synonymous with imperialism, which has been perhaps one of the Nasser era's most lasting ideological legacies, entailed and encouraged a view of the gathering Arab-Israeli conflict as essentially societal. In Egypt this revolutionary societal paradigm arguably rose to prominence as a way for the leadership of the nascent republic to rationalise the avoidance of military conflict. Prior to 1955 the revolutionary regime was tentatively pro-West and relatively open to the idea of reaching some kind of rapprochement with its—also new and unfamiliar—Jewish neighbor (Shlaim 2000). But after that point the State of Israel became in much Egyptian policy discourse a "Zionist entity", a manifestation of imperialism rather than a sovereign actor. The conceptual shift was supported first by Egypt's failure to secure US economic and military aid, and the apparently related Israeli attack on the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip in 1955, and second to the collusion between Israel and the colonial powers Britain and France in the Suez invasion the following year.

Ideas were available to explain or legitimate this reorientation, both from the secular left and religious right. The latter will be addressed later in this paper, but the Nasser regime, as is well known, turned to the left. Egyptian communist intellectuals were insisting on the links between Zionism and imperialism, and then Israel and imperialism, before and after the Free Officers' coup in 1952. For the United Egyptian Communist Party in 1955, "American imperialism...has made Israel its spearhead in its Middle Eastern policy directed against Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia—a springboard for extending its influence and domination over the economy and politics of the Arab countries" (Beinin 1990: 170). "Imperialism is the principal enemy," stated a 1956 report by the Party, while the regime paper *al-Misa* announced soon after the Suez War that Israel was an "imperialist base" and "tool against the Arab liberation movement." The aim of Israel's attacks in 1955 and 1956 was to "break the Arab front and turn the attention of the Arabs from the direct battle with imperialism to an indirect battle with its stepdaughter [*rabiba*], Israel" (Beinin 1990: 180).

Nasser's appraisal of Israel as a "fabricated state" (*dawla mulaffaqa*) also reflected a desire to connect with the global discourse of anti-imperialism that had been inaugurated at the Bandung conference in 1955. In a speech in Cairo, alongside President Sukarno of Indonesia, Nasser announced:

Israel today does not represent for the Egyptians, the Arabs, the Afro-Asian bloc, nor for the world's conscience, only a military aggression toward Egypt or the Arabs, or this region of the world. Rather, it represents something else. It represents the attempt to dominate us by way of this state. Israel represents foreign pressure on the Arabs. It represents the attempt to divide the Arab forces and spread division among them, to prevent them from joining and uniting and benefiting from the fruits of their country and their land. (Abd al-Nasir 1955)

The “Tripartite Aggression” of November 1956 seemed to offer bald proof of Israel’s imperialist role through its collusion with the old colonial powers, Britain and France. Long-held anti-colonialist sentiments were thus adapted to include Israel. The Suez War prompted the channelling of national resentment against Britain as the coloniser, and Israel as the conqueror of Palestine, into a unified hostility toward the West “provoked by the appearance of intimate links between Zionism and Western power” (Mahfouz 1972: 87). After Suez, many Arabs considered the West as whole as the real enemy—an enemy that used Israel to perpetuate its domination. This interpretation served a useful purpose for the Nasser regime. It meant that Nasser could justify not confronting Israel militarily again by insisting that war against imperialism was futile: only a popular revolution could succeed in defeating imperialism, and that would clearly take time and be predicated on the Egyptian revolution’s successful export and concomitant unification of the Arab progressive forces.

The “Israel as imperialism” view provided many of the terms of reference for Nasser’s regional positions, more immediately and rationally than a disembodied and semi-autonomous “Arabism.” According to Nasser’s regional policy doctrine *wahdat al-hadaf* (“Unity of Purpose”) in the early 1960s, the salient divisions in the region were not those between states but rather between progressive and reactionary forces cutting across borders and societies. Under this framework, Israel merged with imperialism and the Arab reactionary forces. Thus did Nasser describe the link in 1964:

The danger of Israel is its existence as it now stands, with all it represents. The first thing it represents—as history and experience have proved—is that it cannot survive without imperialism. It stands for imperialism. It serves imperialism and its objectives of domination and exploitation...It follows that the triumph of freedom and peace in liquidating imperialism cannot occur without affecting Israel’s existence....It is one and the same battle. (Vatikiotis 1978)

A particular image of Israel, as coterminous with imperialism, continued to frame Nasser’s approach to the Arab states and perspective on the failure of “summitry” in the 1960s, when the erstwhile moribund Arab League was revived as a forum for inter-state cooperation. The politics of summitry had, for Nasser, been a mistake: the Arab kings could not help to liberate Palestine, since “the only way to liberate Palestine is revolutionary action.” He stressed, “I do not imagine in any case that Saudi Arabia can fight in Palestine...Saudi Arabia first has to be able to liberate itself from the Americans and the British, then after that it can turn to liberate Palestine.” Nasser complained that after three years of summits, “Arab reaction has shown its true colors...We found that Arab reaction hates us more than it hates Israel, we found that there is coordination between Arab reaction and Israel. We found that the same [people] who support Arab reaction support Israel.” In concluding his point, Nasser stated, “This is our position. We discover Arab reaction in all corners of the Arab nation. Arab reaction works with imperialism and Zionism works with imperialism. So how can Arab reaction fight Zionism?...We cannot coordinate our efforts for Palestine with Arab reaction, because the Arab reaction which betrayed us in 1948 is the Arab reaction present today in 1966” (Abd al-Nasir 1966).

The revolutionary paradigm here inexorably led Nasser toward rhetorically proposing what amounted to a Maoist-style people’s war: “when the Syrian army asked us to participate with them in fighting Israel, we said to them that the battle is greater than Israel. There is a reactionary conspiracy inside Syria, and the battle is an expression of the alliance between Zionism, imperialism and reaction.” Clearly not keen on actually joining such a battle, Nasser nevertheless insisted that because Israel was able to match the Arabs “plane for plane,” “tank for tank,” the Arabs’ most valuable advantage was people: “If we wanted to liberate Palestine we could arm three, two, or

four million and go and liberate Palestine without thought for the victims” (Abd al-Nasir 1966). The responsibility for tackling Israel lay with society, in other words, and not the state. This originally Nasserist conviction would continue in different ways to inform elite opinion in the decades that followed.

### *Egypt as State, Egypt as Revolution*

Despite this rhetorical—and strategic—commitment to a societal paradigm predicated on the idea of a continual revolution, and even “people’s war”, Egypt inevitably had to pursue a conventional foreign policy as a state, and this included dealing with “reactionary” Arab regimes. Egypt was, particularly from 1958, also keen to rebuild links with the United States. Anti-imperialism as a foreign policy framework, therefore, clearly had a limited and specific utility. The contradiction was memorably reconciled by Nasser’s chief adviser, Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, in a formulation that in its essentials continues to inform Egypt’s stance toward Israel. In 1961, Heikal drew a distinction between Egypt as a state and Egypt as a revolution: “If as a state Egypt recognises boundaries in its dealings with governments, Egypt as a revolution should never hesitate or halt before borders” (Kerr 1965: 38).

A similar solution, this time with a chronological dimension, was presented by the intellectual Lutfi al-Khuli in the state-sanctioned Marxist journal *al-Tali’a*: “in the first stage, Egypt will appear in the map of the [Arab] social forces as a separate entity, but later on it will become [an integral] part of the Arab nation [and thus could] lead the over-all battle against imperialism” (Ginat 1997, 85). This model, known as *wahdat al-’amal* (“Unity of Action”) legitimized the abortive period of Arab summitry (1964-1966). It also entailed a view of Israel as a state, rather than an arm of imperialism that could only be defeated via revolution. Almost inevitably, this statist approach increased, rather than diminished, the threat of war as the Arab states pledged to “liquidate” Israel (Shlaim 2000). The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), established in 1964, functioned as an Egyptian foreign policy instrument to in some way substitute for the revolutionary paradigm in relieving Nasser of the obligation to wage war himself.

Nasser’s obsession with remaining the vanguard of Arabism, and being seen to defend Arab causes, is often held to explain the disastrous descent into war with Israel in 1967. Egged on and mocked by radical and conservative Arab states alike for his impotence, according to this view, Nasser took the steps that ultimately brought Egypt past the point of no return. But it is equally valid to see in the brinkmanship of June 1967 the exposure of the irreconcilable contradictions between Egypt as state and Egypt as revolution, and the limited shelf-life of this formulation. As Kerr notes, war with Israel came as a surprise to many: “the conflict to which all signs seemed to point...was between Arab revolutionaries and conservatives” (Kerr 1965: 126). And with Ba’thists in Syria calling for immediate people’s war (against Israel/imperialism), it was the prestige of the Egyptian *revolution*—as the embodiment of societal agency—that was at stake.

The regime continued to identify Israel with imperialism after 1967. Soon after the June war, President Nasser announced that “liberating the homeland from Israel would be no easy matter, because Israel did not stand alone. It operated as a stooge of world imperialism and colonialism” (Dawisha 1976: 128). Domestically, an acceptable reason for Israel’s resounding victory had to be provided to the Egyptian public and portraying Israel as imperialism allowed the regime to absolve itself of some of the responsibility for the defeat, as well as introduce a note of caution regarding the prospects of “erasing the consequences of the aggression” quickly—something the stalemated 1969-1970 War of Attrition over the Sinai bore out. Within the left-wing Nasserist intelligentsia, the journal *al-Tali’a* was quick to defend the regime’s version of events: the war was an all-out imperialist assault on the Arab revolution spearheaded by the United States, and since the

revolutionary regime had not been toppled, Israel could only claim to have inflicted a superficial “setback” (*naksa*) on the Arabs (Abdullah 1967; al-Khuli 1967; Sa'd al-Din 1967).

### *The Collapse of Nasserism*

After 1967, however, the supposed unity of the Egyptian revolution, and intellectual support for Nasserism as a social movement embodied in a state, began to crumble. As elsewhere in the world, students were the first to rebel and did so, tamely in comparison to elsewhere, in 1968. Also as elsewhere, the New Left emerged as a political force in the Middle East. The crux of the Arab New Left's critique was that revolution had stalled in the nominally socialist Arab countries, particularly Egypt. The defeat exposed the inefficacy and bankruptcy of the “*petit bourgeois*” Arab regimes. The only way to defeat imperialism (i.e. Israel) was through a people's war of liberation, *a la* Vietnam, in which Tel Aviv would become Israel's Saigon (Azm 1969; Ibrahim 1973). But this struggle would only succeed in the context of a thoroughgoing socialist transformation across the Arab world. In other words, the responsibility for tackling Israel/imperialism remained resolutely with society.

Developments in Palestine also encouraged Egyptian students to champion a people's war strategy. In the early 1970s much of the New Left shifted its faith from Arab regimes to the PLO as the vanguard of revolution in the Arab world, since the Palestinians were apparently fighting imperialism through Israel. The move was greatly aided by the fact that in 1970 the Soviet Union reversed its previous scorn for the “mythical diversionary groups”, as it dubbed the armed Palestinian group *Fatah* and the other guerrillas, and backed them as a “progressive and patriotic liberation movement” (Sayigh 1999: 250). Charismatic spokesmen like Ghassan Kanafani won over many Egyptian students to this cause in the early 1970s. The call for a “popular liberation war” proved an emotive rallying cry in Egypt, where, according to *Fatah* sources at least, “20,000 Egyptian students and former soldiers” sought to join it in this endeavor (Sayigh 1999: 181). The new president, Anwar Sadat, needless to say, was not sympathetic to the idea and promised to launch his own war to recover the lost territories in the face of growing societal protest, mainly from students, through 1972 (Erich 1989; Abdella 1983; Shukri 1981; Haykal 1983; Haykal 1975).

### *The Islamist Reading*

As is well known, Sadat applied himself to crushing this challenge from the left, as well as the infrastructure of Nasser's regime, by supporting Islamist student groups, rehabilitating the banned Muslim Brotherhood and generally promoting religion. But the left did not have the monopoly on the societal approach to Israel. Alongside the leftist elaboration of people's war another important component of the evolving societal paradigm was the conviction that the most serious threat to Egypt—as an Islamic country—was the “intellectual” invasion spearheaded by Zionists and the “West”. There was a neat circularity to this narrative: the Zionist intellectual invasion targeted Islam because it was, and long had been, the only serious challenge and alternative to Judeo-Christian hegemony. Logically, then, the only way of repelling this invasion was to reinvigorate Islam as the source of societal strength, which meant primary responsibility would rest with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups.

The prominent Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Sayyid Qutb (1970) had articulated this view before the revolution, as had Islamist thinkers Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1988) and Muhammad Galal Kishk. This latter thinker drew no distinction between the communist East and the capitalist West as enemies of Islam. Both helped establish and continued to support Israel in order to attack Islam:

This civilization divides into a number of states and systems; including communist and socialist and capitalist, republican and monarchist; but they come from the same history and from one point: the split from the East and the enmity towards Islamic civilization. This is



the historical unity that supports the unity of interests (*wahdat al-masalih*) and unity of ambitions (*wahdat al-atmi'a*) in our countries, invigorated today by the Zionist activity which moves inside the communist and capitalist camps on Israel's account (*li-hisab Isra'il*)...(Kishk 1966: 7)

Kishk's sharp sense of historical predestination, of the inevitability of conflict between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic worlds, was typical of the Islamist perspective. He considered the Muslim world to be embroiled in "the third crusader war,"<sup>2</sup> which was in its essence an "intellectual invasion" (*ghazw fikri*). In confronting an intellectual or cultural invasion aimed at Muslim society, Kishk insisted, "we have no weapons other than our religion" (1966: 16).

It is worth backtracking here to note that the merging of communism, imperialism and Zionism was itself not a new idea in Egypt. Following the ideological challenge from revolutionary Iraq in 1958, Nasser had described imperialism as the same whether it came from the East or the West (Hanafi 1989: 104). As a "neutral" state, Egypt was against both forms, and Nasser accused the Iraqi revolutionary leader Abd al-Karim Qasim of being a Zionist as well as an ally of the British and the communists (Dawisha 1976). The link had also been drawn by Egyptian Prime Minister Nokrashy in 1948 when Egypt declared war on the new State of Israel "in defence of Arab rights and against Communist atheism and nihilism" (Haykal 1978: 52). The urban anti-Jewish activity in the few years preceding and following the 1948 war had explicitly linked the Jewish-led Egyptian communist movement with local Zionism, often making no distinction between Jews and Zionists (Krämer 1989: 145).<sup>3</sup> Anti-Israeli sentiment in society thus also served the Sadat regime's broader purpose of eradicating the left as a societal force in Egypt. It is also worth noting in passing, as an example of the societal instrumentalization of the Israel factor, that the Islamist violence that led up to Sadat's assassination (ostensibly because of Camp David) began as attacks on communists in Egyptian universities (al-Awa 2006; Kepel 1985).<sup>4</sup>

The societal paradigm has provided the interpretive basis of the so-called "cold peace" that has prevailed between Egypt and Israel since the death of Sadat and as such forms an integral part of Egyptian foreign policy as a whole. As we have seen, this idea of a functional differentiation between state and society in foreign policy was not new, and had been formulated as doctrine by Heikal, Lutfi al-Khuli and others in the 1960s. But the ebbs and flows of intellectual life in the late 1950s and 1960s were very much controlled by Nasser. The revolutionary regime was supposed to embody, as a vanguard, both state and society. This is not to say that there was complete identity of views between regime and intellectuals, but the major independent forces on the left and right had been either co-opted or suppressed. As a result, public discourse was conducted within a

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<sup>2</sup> The first was the medieval Crusade, the second Napoleon's invasion of Egypt.

<sup>3</sup> The judge and historian of the Egyptian national movement, Tariq al-Bishri, notably revised a previously favourable view of the Egyptian communist contribution to the national movement in the 1940s, instead according the Muslim Brotherhood the pivotal role. He now claims not to have realized at the time the extent to which the communists were also Zionists (al-Bishri 2002a: 22).

<sup>4</sup> Clearly "jihadists" from the late 1970s, whose primary theoretician was Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, did not accept the Camp David consensus that Egypt-Israel relations should be conducted through normal diplomatic channels, though like the left they were also against inter-state war between the two countries. For Faraj war between Israel and the current Egyptian state would only strengthen the latter. The leader of *al-Takfir wa-al-Hijra*, Shukri Mustafa, declared that were Israel to invade Egypt the appropriate Muslim response would be to flee and allow the current regime to fall. For this camp the primary enemy was the "near" one, the Egyptian regime, and not Israel (Gerges 2005; Kepel 1985; Jansen and Faraj 1986).

revolutionary orthodoxy in which Nasser supposedly embodied the will of the people. But this unity was, it turned out, chimerical.

The increasingly obvious division between official and intellectual approaches to foreign policy issues, particularly Israel, in this sense reflected the structural characteristics of the Egyptian state. Much ink has been spilt by Egyptian intellectuals themselves as well as Western social scientists and historians seeking to understand the failure of successive Egyptian regimes to organise what we might describe in Gramscian terms as *hegemony* (Waterbury 1983; Ayubi 1995; Dekmejian 1971; Abdel-Malek 1968; Bianchi 1989; Binder 1978; Ansari 1986; Beattie 1994). The revolution has failed to unite state and society toward a common historical endeavor, reflected in a stable, legitimate and universally accepted worldview or ideology. The superficiality of the compromise formulation “Egypt as state, Egypt as revolution” was irreversibly exposed by the trouncing of June 1967. The tension between official policy and societal interests and outlooks would be institutionalized and embraced in the decades that followed, rather than denied as was the Nasserist strategy. This clearly has important implications for the analysis of foreign policy in Egypt and, due to the impact of Egyptian policy outcomes, for the region as a whole. Specifically, the “division of labor” described in this paper is likely to continue in a relatively stable form so long as the structural disconnects in the country persist.

## II. 1973-1979

### *The “Division of Labor” Formalized*

In October 1973 Sadat launched his surprise attack on Israel. The war was a propaganda boon for the president, permanently silencing serious calls from society for war against Israel. Sadat promoted a statist “Egypt first” approach to foreign policy. Whereas Nasser had sought to depoliticise Egypt’s relations with Israel, and lower the risk of war, by employing a societal revolutionary paradigm that downgraded interstate conflict, Sadat officially renounced the war option via agreements with Israel and hence had no need for such justifications.<sup>5</sup> From the mid-1970s official and intellectual society diverged: the state pursued an official policy of peace; society a policy of war, conceived—largely due to the rise of Islamism as a societal force—as one of culture, religion and ideas. This had its own dynamic and was not orchestrated by the regime. But at the same time it shifted responsibility for action away from the state, and thus served a regime purpose.

After 1967, and particularly after the death of Nasser in 1970, the theoretical unity between state and society—hanging as it had been by the threads of Nasser’s charisma and revolutionary myth—had rapidly begun to unravel. One effect of this was the considerably increased intellectual diversity of the Sadat presidency. There were three main trends: a small and weak liberal trend, a strong but declining leftist trend, and a rapidly growing Islamist trend (Beattie 2000). Liberals tended to focus on legal and moral arguments, while also trusting much to the malleability of Western public opinion on the subject of Israel. Some, but by no means all, of this camp advocated peaceful relations with Israel.<sup>6</sup> Leftists of various stripes continued to promote a revolutionary paradigm in the 1970s. Their most powerful competition was the Muslim Brotherhood. Islamists too worked within a

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<sup>5</sup> The Sinai II agreement of 1975 stated that “[T]he conflict between [Egypt and Israel] and in the Middle East shall not be resolved by military force but by peaceful means.”

<sup>6</sup> The most notable pioneers in this regard were Nagib Mahfouz and Tawfiq al-Hakim (Somekh 2004; Haykal 1983).

societal paradigm and stressed non-state threats (imperialism, Zionism) but added a religious dimension by highlighting Judaism as an independent threat as well as, largely for the domestic political reasons alluded to earlier, equating Zionism with communism as twin prongs of a Jewish strategy for world domination (Kuhlah 1977). The view of Israel as imperialism became a motif around which elements of the secular and religious opposition could eventually unite. All three trends stressed the formative role of intellectuals in dealing with Israel, with the latter two seeking to involve the broader mass society as well.

Despite the fact that intellectuals were relatively free to form their own views on Israel, the Sadat regime was far from marginal to the development of ideas. The retreat of the state from confrontation with Israel was, most significantly, signposted by the October Paper, published in the wake of the 1973 war. The war, the paper stated, “has finally halted the expansionist Zionist tide which has been gaining more lands and victories almost once in every generation for nearly a century now, when the first waves of Zionist immigrants started to flow uninterrupted into Palestine” (Sadat 1974: 23). Whereas before the war “all the official programmes of the Israeli parties were based on gaining more forms of expansion, annexing new territories and building cities and settlements,” after Egypt’s victory, “a comprehensive process for self-revision has started in Israel itself, to revise the future of those springboards on which the Zionist belief and the then predominant image of the country’s future—until the eve of the war—was built” (Sadat 1974: 23). With “expansionist” Zionism dead, Israel would reform itself: the Egyptian state had played its part in dealing the decisive blow, and could now withdraw and allow the reconstruction to proceed.

#### *Liberal Readings*

In signing the Sinai Agreements in 1974 and 1975 and ultimately the peace treaty in 1979, Sadat renounced the military option against Israel, which absolved the state of any future responsibility for confronting Israel. No longer calling for “people’s war,” many intellectuals saw that societal actors would have to find a different role. In line with Sadat’s assessment, Zionism was considered in cultural and moral, rather than in territorial expansionist, terms, with Israeli hard power seen to be directed mainly internally against the occupied Palestinians. As such, society would confront Zionism using its own “soft” power: ideas, boycotts, propaganda, providing moral support to the PLO and, later, resisting “normalization”. The cultural, and also moral, perspective was bolstered by the UN General Assembly resolution in 1975 designating Zionism as a form of racism. Writings appeared that focussed on Israeli “culture,” typically juxtaposed with Egyptian, Arab or Islamic culture. In the liberal journal *al-Musawwar* shortly after the 1973 war, for example, Raja al-Naqqash observed that Israeli scholars were studying Nagib Mahfuz and Tawfiq al-Hakim, in order to “know thy enemy.” Naqqash argued that this was part of an Israeli “culture war” against the Arabs and that the Arabs should, for their part, respond in the same way, by learning about Israeli culture and literature (al-Naqqash 1973). Anis Mansour (1977), who accompanied Sadat to Jerusalem and was a close confidant of the president, was probably the most prominent intellectual to put this into practice with his 1977 exposition *Pain in the Heart of Israel*.

Others universalized the war of ideas as pitting the civilized world against the illiberal “fascist” Zionist movement. This argument too had a heritage in Egyptian intellectual circles, having been laid out before the June 1967 war by the journalist Ahmad Baha al-Din (1965). It was also one to which Sadat had turned in seeking to draw Western support away from Israel during the October 1973 war:

In our war, we have not violated values and laws approved by the community of nations and stipulated in its Charter which was inscribed by the blood of free nations after their victory over Fascism and Nazism.

We could well say that our war is the continuation of the war of mankind against Fascism and Nazism, since Zionism with its racial doctrine and its logic of expansion through violence and brutality is but a feeble mimicry of Nazism and Fascism—a mimicry which provokes derision and not fear, deprecation and not hatred. (Sadat 1973)

Many intellectuals came to see their role in the conflict as at least in part trying to persuade Western public opinion that Israel, not the Arabs, was the villain of the piece. In 1975 a short co-authored book appeared entitled *Zionism and Racism*, addressing the UN resolution of that year. Under the influence of Zionism, the writer Mufid Shihab al-Din suggested, Judaism itself underwent a transformation in the twentieth century, from being a universalist religion to a racist form of national solidarity (Shihab al-Din et al 1977: 13).

Shihab al-Din portrayed Zionism and Israel as being out of step with international norms and morality. The Arab world's struggle against Zionism was a dimension of the broader global struggle for a "new economic order, built on justice and economic liberation, and the global call to expand the Non-Aligned bloc" (1977: 23). In light of the interconnectedness of Zionism and Israel, the UN resolution not only constituted a condemnation of Zionism, but also called into question the legitimacy of Israel as a state—of the presence, and not just the practices, of Israel, and of the legitimacy of Israel's membership in the United Nations. For Shihab al-Din, this should form the foundation of an intellectual effort to expose the racist essence of Zionism—and, by extension, Israel. In this way, not only Arab, but also world, public opinion could be convinced of Israel's true nature and prepare the ground for "the Arab liberation movement to enter into the fateful struggle against Zionism" (1977: 24).

### *The Left*

Figures on the left elaborated on the Nasser-era revolutionary paradigm after 1973 to argue that a broad based societal movement was the only way to tackle Israel, particularly as Zionism was seen to represent a nefarious influence *within* Egyptian society. With the left on the decline and Islamist forces rising in the 1970s, it is not surprising that leftists should seek to build such a united front. Leftists also sought to attribute the growth of Islamic extremism to Zionism (mirroring, in its instrumentalization, Islamist equation of Zionism and communism). Ghali Shukri (Shukri 1981: 390), for example, saw Sadat as part of an international counter-revolution, with religious extremist dimensions, while Nasser's favorite Marxist, Lutfi al-Khuli, alleged that the regime was assisted by hidden ties with neo-colonialism (Beattie 2000: 174). Al-Khuli believed that the US and Israel were behind the emergence of *salafist* groups like *al-Takfir wa-al-Hijra* in the 1970s, and called for a united front to foil the attempts of big (US) and little (Israeli) imperialisms to use religion against it. A strong movement uniting progressive religious and secular forces could end this Zionist and imperialist manipulation of religious differences (al-Khuli 1986: 67, 75). Supporting the PLO was also, for al-Khuli, to be encouraged, since the Palestinian resistance mobilized the entire Arab movement, including progressive religious forces (al-Khuli 1986: 78).

Al-Khuli, like others, was nonetheless realistic about the prospects of defeating imperialism via mass social action, and clearly was not calling for the overthrow of complicit Arab regimes. He thus allowed that the states of the region also had a potentially constructive role to play. He called for respecting the independence and sovereignty of states, along with the rights and freedoms of its people, including the Palestinians' right to build their own state (al-Khuli 1986: 33). In calling for "national coexistence" (*ta'ayush qawmi*) al-Khuli stressed that cooperation with reactionaries should be limited to those areas that directly served essential shared interests, such as creating an

independent Palestinian state, while the social struggle continued throughout the entire Middle East region.

In arguing for a Middle Eastern détente, al-Khuli's focus was on peaceful coexistence among the Arab states of the region, and as such his thought represents a direct heir to the Nasserist Unity of Action doctrine that he, Heikal and others helped elaborate in the 1960s. A more radical intellectual evolution, that moved beyond Unity of Action but maintained the societal dimension to Egyptian-Israeli relations, was spearheaded by another Marxist in the 1970s. In *After the Guns Fall Silent*, written shortly after the October 1973 War, Muhammad Sid Ahmed (Sid Ahmad 1976) suggested that a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict was not only a possible, but the only plausible, outcome if the interests of both Arabs and Israelis were to be secured. Sid Ahmed stressed that two national communities existed, the Arab and the Israeli, and that each had rights that should be safeguarded, both for moral reasons and for the pragmatic reason that the Arabs would never achieve their goals unless they joined the rest of the world, including the socialist countries, in recognising the rights of Israelis. What was needed was a Middle Eastern détente in which the strengths and interests of Arabs and Israelis would be recognized and respected, and, unlike in al-Khuli's formulation, would include Israel.

A key element in Sid Ahmed's reasoning was his distinction between vertical and horizontal contradictions in the Middle East. "Vertical contradictions," those between states, were likely to provoke intense conflict, while "horizontal contradictions," within and across Jewish and Arab society as a whole, would remain independent of whether individual states were reconciled. Thus accepting a settlement with Israel, like rapprochement with the conservative Arab states, need not be a "reactionary" solution, since the social (horizontal) struggle could continue regardless (Sid Ahmad 1976: 73). Even if Israel was a "tool" of imperialism, this should not deter the left from supporting a settlement with it. The solution for the progressive societal movement would involve two distinct steps. First, in order to stand up to Western economic imperialism, the Arabs would have to reinvigorate indigenous capitalism. Then, having separated the Arab nation from the world imperialist system, it could break with capitalism altogether. As for Israel, released from its imperialist tethers it could, much like the crusader states of the Levant, fade into the Arab landscape to become a focus for Jewish culture in the region "freed from manipulation and exploitation" (1976: 122).

#### *Islamist Views*

Islamists, such as the contributors to the Muslim Brotherhood's *al-Da'wa* newspaper, were less than optimistic about the potential for such rapprochement, but replicated some leftwing axioms, particularly regarding imperialism. The effectiveness of Jewish domination in Palestine was guaranteed, for Abd al-Mu'im Salim, first and foremost by "World Zionism". Westerners that helped Zionists "did so not out of love for them, as nobody could love them." The issue was rather "imperial interests and connivance against Islam." In support of this contention, Salim cited the US vice president Nelson Rockefeller's statement that God sent the Jews to the East to help revive it, and that the Arabs would benefit from Israeli knowledge and civilization. He went on to explain that the unity between Israel and the United States was encapsulated in their joint interests in "developing" (*tatwir*) Arab society. But the Brotherhood writers tended to stress cultural and religious imperialism. "Development," for Salim, was code for erasing Islamic identity, destroying customs and stamping out values and traditions. Salim observed that this goal was well known to all Jews and the capitalist and communist West, but ignored by many Arabs and Muslims. The appropriate response was to reinvigorate Islam. Salim supported his argument by citing a comment by Shimon Peres at the time to the effect that Islam was the main impediment to achieving peace in the region (Salim 1977: 44).

*Al-Da'wa* also focussed on the issue of Jerusalem, particularly in the context of Israeli plans to rebuild Solomon's Temple on the Temple Mount, which would threaten the al-Aqsa mosque. The Jerusalem theme effectively integrated the themes of Israeli expansionism and Jewish enmity toward Islam. Salih Ashmawi (1977), *al-Da'wa's* editor, warned the Arab leaders that they would face dire consequences from society if they did not keep Jerusalem and al-Aqsa safe. Ala' Zaydan (1977) alerted *al-Da'wa's* readers to the construction work that was taking place around the mosque, using the immediate issue to discuss the "religious roots of the Jews' war against the Arabs." The destruction of al-Aqsa was to be interpreted as a step along the road to destroying Islam and establishing a Jewish state from the Nile to the Euphrates. After al-Aqsa, the Israelis would move to Medina. But there was no call for the Egyptian state to act – the onus was placed on society, and this time religious leadership. "When," Zaydan implored, "will the Muslim *ulema* [legal scholars] move?" "When will the silence end?"

### *Synthesis*

Work by Abdelwahhab Elmessiri—particularly his magnum opus, the *Encyclopaedia of Zionist Concepts and Terms* (1975)—also framed the Arab relationship with Israel in terms of a war of ideas to be waged by society and synthesized the main societal perspectives, particularly the leftist and Islamist approaches. Israel, for Elmessiri was organically linked to imperialism, but this factor was most important in that imperialism allowed, or encouraged, the persistence of "fascist" Zionist ideology. Zionism, in turn, could not be explained without reference to Judaism, and he saw the threat of Zionism to Egypt and the broader Arab world as primarily cultural. Elmessiri's encyclopaedia sought to convey the ideological nature of terms like "the Jewish people" and "Jewish history" and show how such terms disguised Zionists' true purpose, which was settlement and colonization (Elmessiri 1975: 18-20). Israelis subscribed willingly to these ideas as a result of the fusion between Judaism and the Zionist national project, assisted by imperialism, to form Israeli culture. The danger for the Arabs was two-fold. The first was that Zionist ideology would in turn permeate Arab consciousness and culture. As evidence of this process in action, he lamented the fact that Hebrew phrases and names of groups were transliterated directly into Arabic resulting in "ugly" syntactic formulations. The second was that Zionism also infused Western culture and thus posed an indirect threat. The *Encyclopaedia* itself thus represented an act of resistance against the perceived intellectual threat of Zionism to the Arab consciousness.

Elmessiri (1977) also published in English, which reveals his conviction that the Arab-Israeli conflict was reproduced as a war of ideas and culture not only in the Middle East but in the West as well. Like other western-educated Egyptian intellectuals Elmessiri saw part of society's role to be influencing the West as Israel's main supporter. This involved not just arguing the justness of the Arab cause, but also exposing the Israeli case as bogus, "ideological" and counter to the stream of modern civilization. Although it appears in many ways to constitute an anti-Semitic tract with a veneer of social science respectability, the *Encyclopaedia* has been consistently augmented and reissued and has been extremely influential in reconciling the revolutionary and religious paradigms for interpreting Israel.<sup>7</sup> Elmessiri not only sets out the case for society's role in the culture war against Israel, but with his encyclopaedia provides a stock of ammunition.

### **III. The Camp David Consensus Today**

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<sup>7</sup> In an interview with the author Elmessiri said he believed his greatest contribution to Islamist thought was the materialist perspective he brought from his past affinities with the left (Cairo, August 22, 2006).

The Camp David Accords and the subsequent Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty have provided the formal framework under which Egypt has conducted its relations with Israel during the Mubarak presidency. Under the terms of the Peace Treaty of 1979, following Israeli interim withdrawal from the Sinai the parties “will establish normal and friendly relations” including “full recognition, diplomatic, economic and cultural relations.” While Israel and the Egyptian state are thus formally committed to “normalization,” however, the first Camp David Accord of September 1978 stipulated that a “self-governing authority” be established for Palestinians. Israel’s continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the still only partial sovereignty Egypt enjoys over Sinai, has led many to accuse Israel of not keeping its side of the bargain and to argue that, as such, Egypt is not obliged to work toward normalization. While, for many, the Treaty is thus unworkable and in need of adjustment or cancellation, there exists a strong societal norm of opposition to normalization alongside an acceptance of the Camp David Accords as the instrument that ended the state of war between the two countries.

Egyptian relations with Israel in the era of Mubarak can, as previously mentioned, be described as “correct” but not warm. It is the “coldness” of the peace for which intellectual contributions such as those examined above can claim some credit, and which is intelligible as a division of labor between state and society. The widely accepted idea that the Egyptian state and society have distinct roles to play in pursuing foreign policy toward Israel is what may be termed the “Camp David consensus.” Without wishing to dismiss developments in the 1980s and 1990s, the foundations of this consensus were laid in the 1970s and it is now possible to examine its more recent manifestations. Crucially, societal opposition to Israel and to normalization enjoyed greater freedom of expression after the death of Anwar Sadat who, in his last years, had clamped down hard on dissent. But mass protest never developed to the extent of actually threatening Egyptian-Israeli peace.<sup>8</sup> Israel’s bombing of the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981, invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the intifada of 1987-1993 would prompt demonstrations of public support for the Palestinians. Such protests were permitted by the Mubarak regime, which, following the assassination of Sadat, saw the value in such “safety valves” for popular grievances. They were, moreover, of further use “because they facilitate[d] the Egyptian government’s playing an active role in Arab politics ... and an improved bargaining position with both the United States and the Israelis” (El-Sayed 1989: 49).

Popular support for the Palestinians has also served opposition purposes in allowing intellectuals and political activists on the left and right to carve out a sphere of autonomous political action, relatively safe from governmental censure.<sup>9</sup> The Palestine issue has, moreover, continued to present the most significant issue around which disparate strands of the Egyptian opposition can unite. Sympathy for Palestinians has not, however, translated into the weakening of the Camp David consensus. At most, the regime has been willing to recall its ambassador from Tel Aviv, as occurred

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<sup>8</sup> Reliably assessing “mass” opinion, particularly during this period, is almost impossible, though research carried out by Azar and Almashat among university students in 1980 (Korany 1983) found that support for the peace process was distinctly lukewarm (46 percent in favour of the treaty, 36 opposed). Islamists in the late 1970s organized demonstrations against Camp David, though this was not the main focus of their political programmes. Their campaigns prompted Sadat to carry out sweeping purges of opposition leaders in the last year of his life. Mubarak opted to allow controlled demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinians to take place since they were not deemed to be direct threats to his regime. Crucially, and unlike in the early 1970s, these protests were not calling on Mubarak to return Egypt and Israel to a war footing and as such formed a part of, rather than undermined, the Camp David consensus.

<sup>9</sup> This freedom has varied depending on the international and domestic political climate. Following the rise of HAMAS in the Gaza Strip from 2006, for example, the regime has been less permissive about expressions of mass support for Palestine, particularly from an Islamist direction.

following the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon in 1982, and the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000. Egyptians have largely accepted the Camp David consensus that Egypt should conduct its relations at the state level through accepted diplomatic channels while social movements continue to confront Zionism. A good example of this was the reaction of the then left wing opposition newspaper *al-Sha'b* following Israel's invasion of Lebanon. Although criticising the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel as a trap to enable Israel to continue its regional aggression, the paper emphasized society's role and called for volunteers to support the Palestinian and Lebanese people and for the government to "reiterate its support for the 'Palestinian revolution'" (Korany 1983). There was no call for Egyptian military action.

This essay has presented a rather stark dichotomy between state and civil society, but clearly the state does not hover above society, and it is true that not all Egyptian intellectuals are part of the "culture of war." The most prominent example of an attempt to institutionalize progress toward cultural, or societal, normalization is perhaps the so-called "Copenhagen Group" that was formed during the right-wing Netanyahu premiership in 1997 (Khalil 1998). Linked to the Israeli "Peace Now", in the 1990s, the Cairo branch of the International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace included the ideologically ephemeral Lutfi al-Khuli and Muhammad Sid Ahmed until their passing a few years ago. The group brought together Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian intellectuals to campaign for peace. This group and its members were pilloried by many who opposed "normalization," as, for example, "a poison dagger splitting our movement" (Rizq 1998). "Peace is too important to be left only to governments," announced the Copenhagen Declaration that inaugurated the movement. But although the Copenhagen Group's attempts to bring society into line with official state policy toward Israel have thus far proven ineffective, it too emphasises a societal approach in Egyptian foreign policy. Some Egyptian intellectuals certainly support, or at least do not strenuously oppose, normalization with Israel. But there exists a powerful societal norm of opposition to normalization, reflected in the tone of the independent press, as well as institutionalized in the basic laws of syndicates, such as the journalists', that forbid contacts with Israelis in the name of resisting normalization. This was recently illustrated in the furore surrounding the editor of the state-owned *al-Ahram's Democracy* magazine, Hala Mustafa, who faced sanction from the journalists' syndicate for meeting Israeli ambassador Shalom Cohen (Kenyon 2009).

Those supportive of normalization are often described as "liberals."<sup>10</sup> And Sadat indeed appealed to liberal ideas of interests and state sovereignty to justify his foreign policy shift toward Israel. But not all agree that this position is in Egypt's interests. In an interesting series of articles in the popular independent Egyptian daily, *al-Misri al-Yawm* (*The Egyptian Today*), Ahmad Moslemani accuses the "normalization liberals" of hijacking Egyptian liberalism and contributing to the misunderstanding that only the left and Islamists oppose normalization. Moslemani complains that many see Islamist and leftist positions as "ideological" but not liberal ones. For Moslemani, on the contrary, the "normalization liberals" support normalization on principle, rather than based on a pragmatic assessment of "interest" as true liberals should. Supporters of normalization do so no matter what happens; they do not adapt to change:

If Sharon comes to power, no change...; if Gaza is pounded, no change; if Egypt is cornered in international and global forums, no change; if foreign alliances and the American military umbrella...threaten our independence and national security – no change. (Moslemani 2009a)

Normalization, for Moslemani, is not in Egypt's interest and supporters of it should be exposed for the "ideologists" that they are. They are not sincere either as patriots or as liberals. Moslemani's

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<sup>10</sup> For example, and for a recent supportive position, see Sharaf al-Din (2009)



analysis is perhaps typical of the Camp David consensus: “there is a big difference, in my interpretation, between the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement and normalization... I am one of those that support Camp David and reject normalization.” For Moslimani, the Camp David Accords ended a state of war between Israel and Egypt such that politics could take over from armed conflict: this is normal where war has not yielded sufficient results but it is not possible to continue fighting. Both the military and political approaches are valid national positions,

But I do not see any valid patriotic justification for the normalization process, by which I mean normalization of journalists, intellectuals, artists and technocrats, who see in Camp David the beginning of love, and not a kind of politics. Camp David was an effort at national liberation after an unprecedentedly glorious war. But normalization is an exercise in national regression, wasting the efforts of war and peace alike. (Moslemani 2009b)

The most prominent, and politically relevant, intellectual current in Egypt today is Islamist, and it would be disingenuous to speak of any kind of consensus without giving Islamist views centre stage. Although there are numerous strands of Islamism and even the Muslim Brotherhood cannot be considered as a unitary actor, a view of Israel as representing some combination of imperialism, Judaism and unjustly wielded state power, can perhaps be posited as the “mainstream” Islamist position. Society’s oppositional role, according to this view, is based on a conception of Zionism as economic and cultural imperialism that should be resisted; as well as primarily religious solidarity with the Palestinians. This conception owes much to syntheses like that of Elmessiri discussed above, as well as to similar depictions by “Islamic leftists” like Galal Amin, Tariq al-Bishri and the late Adel Hussein. Amin, for example, opposed the formation of the “Middle East Market” as a Zionist plot, and called for coordination between Islamist and leftist national forces in the struggle against Zionism in much the same way as did Lutfi al-Khuli in the 1970s (Amin 1998). Adel Hussein was in favor of a united Arab-Iranian front against the American-Zionist alliance (Husayn 1998). The prominent leftist-turned Islamist judge Tariq al-Bishri (al-Bishri 2002b), perhaps most explicit in putting the Camp David consensus into words, allowed that the Egyptian government had to deal with Israel via accepted diplomatic channels, while Egyptian and other Arab and Muslim societies should campaign on a social level against Zionism.

For many Islamist thinkers, Israel does not so much represent the embodiment of an age-old Jewish conspiracy for world domination—the so-called “traditional” thesis—as it does the spearhead of a broader Western agenda to subjugate the Arab world by, among other things, subverting its Arab-Islamic values and identity. The anti-Israeli sentiments espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood, which must be counted as among the most influential in Egyptian society today, reveal a particular reading of modernity and its effects in the Middle East rather than anti-Jewish sentiment *per se*, although their historical analysis still tends toward the conspiratorial. On more than one recent occasion ‘Isam al-Aryan, the Brotherhood’s “liberal” political chief, has set out his interpretation of the birth of the modern Middle East, in which the role of Zionism has been both deleterious and central: Prior to the beginning of Zionist settlement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Muslims and Christians of the Middle East had good relations with Jews. It was the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II’s refusal to grant the Zionists a national home that led them into the arms of Western imperialists. The Caliphate itself was the number one victim of this unholy conspiracy, and the modern “Western” states—not least Turkey—were set up to protect Israel, separate Muslims from their religion and prevent the unification of the Arabs. It is no coincidence, for Aryan, that Anwar Sadat had a picture of Ataturk in his office. But simplistic and conspiratorial though Aryan’s reading of history may appear, it is a far cry from the age-old Jewish quest for world domination narrative the Brotherhood used to promote. For Aryan, the religious dimension of this history lies in the symbols the Zionist movement employed to attract non-Zionist Jews to the promised land (Aryan 2008).

Aryan links Israel to the paramount political concern of the Muslim Brotherhood and other societal actors in the late-Mubarak era: the persistence of authoritarian rule—which reveals the continuing instrumentalization of the Israel factor by societal movements. It was primarily the regimes' suppression of democracy that allowed Zionism to flourish and Israel to survive in the region, and al-Aryan argues that realising democracy in Egypt would signal the beginning of the end for Israel. This is not because he believes a democratically accountable Brotherhood government would declare war on Israel, but because "freedom" would allow Islam, the key societal bulwark against Zionism, to flourish. Rather vaguely, he concludes:

Everyone is aware that the establishment of democracy in our country would hasten the abolition of the Zionist presence in Palestine, not because immediate wars would be launched, as some might imagine ... but because the real renaissance will begin when freedoms are unleashed. (Aryan 2009)

It is fascinating in the context of this paper to compare these sentiments to an earlier comment al-Aryan made regarding the future foreign policy of a Muslim Brotherhood-controlled Egypt. Aryan affirmed that such a government would:

Recognise Israel and respect the treaties, although the Camp David treaty would have to be modified in accordance with our preferences. This does not mean that we will declare war, but we will revise some of the treaties and agreements to better suit Egyptian interests. (al-Hayat 2007)

Aryan was sharply rebuked and forced to retract this statement, in which he argued he was misquoted, by the then Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood Mahdi Akef, who stated that the Brotherhood did not and will never recognise Israel, and that "Israel is not in the Brotherhood's dictionary." (al-Hayat 2007). But Akef stopped short of explicitly promising to annul the treaty. He expressed the Muslim Brotherhood's position as being that "our position will never be separated from the people's in their rejection of the treaty," and that the "Egyptian people will decide with their votes whether to accept or reject the treaty" (Salih 2007). The row illustrates the extent to which prominent intellectuals continue to reserve a distinct foreign policy role for society. As a social movement, the Muslim Brotherhood will continue to fight Zionism, but as a government, it would deal with Israel state-to-state. It also seems that Aryan's main crime was to make the Brotherhood's acceptance of the Camp David consensus explicit, whereas Akef and others would rather it were kept secret. The Brotherhood's stance is notably not so far from that of the liberal cause célèbre, Ayman Nur, who has argued that greater democracy, transparency and accountability are the priority in determining Egypt's policy toward Israel, and that it is those values that have been sacrificed in the name of "no sound louder than the battle" (Nur 2006).

A similar perspective is expressed in a recent article by prominent Islamist thinker Fahmi Huwaidi. The article appeared against the backdrop of the Hala Mustafa affair described above. Huwaidi's analysis is McCarthyist in tone: Israel is trying to dominate Egyptian society by penetrating its political and media, as well as business, establishment. Names are named. Huwaidi bemoans the weakness of an Egyptian national movement that cannot even sustain a boycott of Israel, despite the fact that even European countries can. He too argues that the main reason for society's weakness in the face of Israel, which represents an existential security threat to Egypt, is the lack of democratic freedom and the regime's progressive eradication of independent civil institutions (Huwaidi 2009). Again, there is an implicit assumption that it is Egyptian society that should, and will when sufficiently empowered, play the decisive foreign policy role.

#### IV. Conclusion

The Israel factor in Egyptian politics suggests that foreign policy should be viewed as a composite picture—as the combination of state and societal positions. Policy cannot be understood in terms of a “momentarily fixed” identity because of the coexistence of multiple theories of international relations, paradigms, and prognoses about the roles and responsibilities of the state versus society as foreign policy actors. In the Egyptian case an official policy of peace coexists, in a more-or-less stable way, with a culture of war. Whereas Nasser tried, and failed, to depoliticise relations (and avoid war) with Israel through the promotion of a societal revolutionary paradigm, Sadat officially renounced the war option at the state level, but encouraged the continuation of societal resistance to Israel, with the war conceived in terms of cultural imperialism. Those two societal paradigms have been progressively synthesized, and also linked to a more liberal view about the role of a malleable public opinion, both Arab and Western, in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The societal anti-normalization consensus is tolerated, if not actively encouraged, by the Egyptian regime and serves several purposes, most significantly to depoliticize the state’s role in confronting Israel militarily. But it has its own dynamic and deep roots in Egypt’s modern political and intellectual history. This division of labor in foreign policy, the Camp David consensus, is the essence of the “cold peace.”

This paper has shown that ideas on Israel are doubly instrumentalized in a way that is related ultimately to the structure and character of the Egyptian state itself. The ideas available for conceptualising Israel have not been drawn from a free-floating reservoir of “Arabist” preconceptions. The example of recent identity-related discourse on Iran may suffice to illustrate the pitfalls of taking ideas at face value. Recent attempts by some to replace Israel with Iran as regional bogeyman seem, in light of the above, rather naïve and caution that scholars of foreign policy and IR in general, rather than taking ideas uncritically as “constitutive” of interests, or reflective of identity, need to look carefully at the structure and historical context of the states and societies in which those ideas are developed. In comparison with Israel, which has exerted a dialectical and, in many ways, formative influence on Egyptian worldviews and self-conceptions—reflecting the structural asymmetries of the Egyptian state—Iran has been largely peripheral to Egyptian concerns. The assertion that Iran seeks to spread Shi’ism, aimed at exploiting Egyptians’ Sunni Muslim identity and mirroring anti-Zionist rationales, neglects the extent to which it has been the idea of Israel’s “imperialism” (something Egyptians at all levels of society have experienced and learnt to detest since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) rather than its Jewish or non-Arab nature that has united social movements and intellectuals in opposition to it. Identity politics, in this case, is far wide of the mark.

Judging by the Egyptian case examined here, teleological approaches to international relations that stress the constitutive nature of shifts in national identity fail to do justice to the multi-level nature of foreign policy, the structure of states and the significance of ideas as reflections of these. As the study of the Egyptian case reveals, state and society have been accorded different, though often complimentary, roles by intellectuals and leaders. This dualism has, moreover, been evident since the 1950s and relates fundamentally to the structure of the Egyptian state itself. The oft-mentioned identity shift from Arabism to statism in the years following the 1967 war does not help us understand or explain the cold peace, and nor is it sensitive to the ways in which conceptions of Israel reflect domestic actors’ conceptions of their own roles, nor the “double-instrumentalization,” by state and societal actors of Israel as a foreign policy issue. The Camp David consensus whose history this paper has traced thus suggests that a more nuanced and historically sensitive account of the rootedness of ideas and their role in foreign policy may better explain such apparently puzzling foreign policy orientations.

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